



Winter 2015 Newsletter

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1. Themes of our winter newsletter

To celebrate the new partnership between *LivingSpirituality* and Winchester University's **Institute of Theological Partnership**, theologian-artist Dr Megan Clay has written about the process of creating the artwork for the **Cosmic Walk**. The Walk is located in the grounds of the University, and was introduced by liberation and feminist theologian, Lisa Isherwood, when she became Professor at the Institute.

Megan's article talks about the importance of the new cosmology and particularly addresses the importance for the upbringing of girls of giving them an understanding of the connection between

the energies present in the ongoing unfolding of the cosmos and the sacredness of their own creative energy.

Of current interest in increasing our understanding our place in the cosmos is Ian Mowll's piece about an important event organised by **Greenspirit** in March this year, exploring **The Universe Story** and its link with both science and spirituality.

Heather Jane Ozanne, founder of **Spirit of Peace** and LS Steering Group member, has written about the recent impactful UK visit by **Sami Awad**, a Palestinian Christian whose passionate words engender hope against a backdrop of increasingly adverse circumstances in the Middle East.

Courageous efforts to pursue peaceful dialogue between the Jewish and Christian communities in London are covered in brief in an account of the conclusion of the **joint Harvest/Sukkot festival** held at St James's Piccadilly last autumn.

The **rebirthing of God** is the topic of a rich and challenging new book by John Philip Newell, which we review and which was also the focus for our LS Journeying Together December meeting.

In November **LivingSpirituality** held a very successful launch of June Boyce-Tillman's new book, **In Tune with Heaven or Not**, concerning women's input to liturgical music. The event also launched the **new LS Music and Spirituality Group** - www.livingspirit.org.uk/music-and-spirituality-group.

This event was also the first Annual Lecture organised **as a partnership between LivingSpirituality and Rev Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James's Piccadilly**. At the launch we benefited from June's inspirational singing, as well as her creative and acerbic insights into the state of liturgical music and how it can become more inclusive. Here we review the book and give details of the new Music and Spirituality Special Interest Group.

We also comment on **The Male Journey UK**, an initiative aimed at enabling men to recognise the importance of relatedness, to tap into the cosmic story and to draw upon the wisdom of

both the Judeo-Christian tradition and that of other traditions.

Julie Dunstan writes about **Encounter**, the London Centre for Spirituality's innovative course in Spiritual Direction, and participants comment on its value for them. Finally we cover a brave attempt to bring about **political change** in time for the General Election by LS supporter Peter Challen.

2. The Cosmic Walk at Winchester University: The infinite possibilities of our incarnational becoming

by Dr Megan Clay

The Cosmic Walk situated in the West Down Campus in the University of Winchester was the brainchild of Michael and Erna Colebrook who worked with GreenSpirit in Plymouth. The Cosmic Walk was to be based on their version of walking the sacred story and was to have been created in the grounds of the University College of St Mark and St John in Plymouth, Devon. It moved to Winchester University when liberation and feminist theologian Lisa Isherwood became Professor there.

The Cosmic Walk was created in celebration of Professor Isherwood's inauguration into the University of Winchester in 2008 and her theological lecture was entitled '[Wanderings in the Cosmic Garden](#)'. It began by asking the question, 'why theology in the garden'?

It takes us back to the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden and reminds us that the story of the fall of man through Eve in Genesis 1 has been misinterpreted by traditional theologians throughout Christian history.

The new story that Professor Isherwood wants us to engage with theologically is a story that asks us to consider ourselves in relation to the whole cosmos. A story that is not only informed by theology but also science and the mythological stories that have been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years - stories that the great religions have been woven out of; stories that give humanity meaning in their lives.

I was commissioned to paint the first fifteen panels of art work that were to begin that story of consideration in the garden.

You can read about the process involved in creating the artwork and view some of the images at www.livingspirit.org.uk/cosmic-walk. You can also view the Cosmic Walk brochure [here](#).

Dr Megan Clay is an artist and independent scholar in Feminist Liberation Theology and the New Cosmology. She is Artist in Residence at the University of Winchester's Cosmic Walk.

3. The Universe Story Event

by Ian Mowll

“The story of the Universe is the epic unfolding of the world, an evolutionary tale of awesome scope. It speaks of unity and diversity, of desire and curiosity, of wonder and awe. It speaks of creativity and imagination, of death, destruction and transformation. It is the story of science. It is the story of spirit. It is the story of all beings, extinct, present and yet to be born. It is a sacred story of magical unfolding, a story that is still being born and told in you and me, now. It is a story, once known, that has the power to inspire our species into becoming the species we were born to be.” From *The Universe Story: In Science and Myth* by Greg Morter and Niamh Brennan.

In the general public, there is a slow, and tangible, growing interest in the Universe Story. Brian Cox's recent TV series *The Human Universe* is an example of this. In addition, groups have sprung up such as *The Big History Project*, *Global Generation* and *The Ancestor's Trail* which tell people about the Universe Story and what we can learn from it.

Why is this the case? **Human beings have always had a desire to know where we have come from, why we are here and where we are going.** The Universe Story does not answer all of these questions, but it does give us hints and clues. And science is an increasing form of

reference for many people for the big questions of our time.

Responding to this growing interest, GreenSpirit decided to put on the Universe Story Event - welcoming people of all faiths and none. As expected, we are starting to attract people from alternative spirituality communities to the event. And we are also attracting a small but growing number of people who are atheists, humanists or agnostics.

What is interesting about this is that these people are drawn (at least in part) **by the awe and wonder of the Universe Story**. This is the same awe and wonder that attracts people to spiritual traditions - cathedrals and mosques have been built to evoke these feelings. So, it seems to me that **the Universe Story is a story for our time that can help make connections between people who, traditionally, would not have a great deal in common.**

That is just one reason for putting on the event. There are many other things we can learn from the Universe Story that are relevant today. Just one example is to understand that we have this one precious planet and that we have to take care of it to ensure the survival of the human race and many other species. **The Universe Story can help to give us the motivation to combat species destruction, climate change and the ecological crisis of our time.**

The Universe Story Event is about the story as revealed by science from the origin of the Universe 13.7 billion years ago, through the creation of the stars, galaxies, planet Earth and life on Earth to the emergence of modern day humans. It also addresses what we can learn from this amazing story that is relevant today. At this event we will have speakers, stalls, creative activities, discussion and more.

The Universe Story Event will be held on 14th March 2015 in London. For more information, go to www.greenspirit.org.uk/uni-story-event or phone 020 8552 2096.

Ian Mowll is the Coordinator of Greenspirit.

4. Hope Emerging from Palestine

by Heather-Jane Ozanne

Sami Awad is the founder and Director of The Holy Land Trust (HLT) in Bethlehem. The Holy Land Trust has developed several main areas of work under the 'Occupation' which has devastating effects on their community, Bethlehem being largely surrounded by a security/separation wall. Nonviolence is at the core of their work, with leadership training using a Non-Linear leadership programme and community healing and transformation also central to their activities. Please see www.holylandtrust.org for further information.

Since I first got to know HLT through the work of Spirit of Peace as well as personal and family connections, I sensed that HLT's work was significant not only in their own situation but also in a global context as **a model for resolving community tension and creating transformation and promoting healing.** Sami Awad's recent trip to the UK was affirmation of this. Hosted by the Amos Trust, Sami travelled far and wide in England, Scotland and Wales.

Spirit of Peace was delighted to organise his time in Scotland where he spoke at a range of events on tackling sectarianism and addressing the question, 'How can we create a future of peace from a history of pain?' His spiritually empowered approach to deep and pressing issues facing human communities is inspiring and hopeful and provides **a model for people who wish to live a socially-engaged spirituality, addressing the inequalities and conflict, locally and globally.**

'Towards Human Flourishing'

Certainly there are rich resources here for us, as we develop a section on the ***Living Spirituality*** website on the theme of 'Towards Human Flourishing', in order to share resources and information for those of us whose spirituality is expressed through engagement with the issues involved in working towards a fairer world where all people can live in peace.

Heather-Jane Ozanne is Founder Director of Spirit of Peace (www.spiritofpeace.co.uk) and a member of the LS Steering Group. She frequently travels to the Middle East.

5. Joint Harvest/Sukkhhot Celebration - courageous and fruitful bridge-building

by Petra Griffiths

A week of important events aimed at building relations between Christians and members of Jewish communities at St James's Piccadilly ended with a meeting on **Hope in the Face of Climate Change**, looking at what positive actions can be taken for a better future. It culminated in a magical interlude in the Sukkah that had been built from plastic bottles in the garden at St James's, where the band Don Kipper played. A Sukkah is a fragile booth, built outside with a roof made of leaves and branches, and walls without doors, similar to the fragile dwellings in which the Israelites dwelt during their 40 years of travel in the desert after the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. A Sukkah is open to all, and is a place to share what God has provided.

I greatly admire the courage of Rabbi Natan Levy of the Jewish Social Action Forum and of Rev Lucy Winkett of St James's, who were determined to do this bridge-building exercise between members of the Christian and Jewish faiths, despite the strong feelings and views that the Bethlehem Unwrapped

Festival at St James's in January had provoked, and which still prevail, leading to considerable criticism of both sides for making this peace-building effort.

The healing atmosphere in the Sukkah on the last night was perhaps a reflection of the costly efforts that had been involved in this joint celebration. I salute all who took part and who supported it, including West London Synagogue, The Trussell Trust, Gift and LS supporter Joan Ishibashi whose volunteer coordination made it all possible.

6. Review of *The Rebirthing of God: Christianity's Struggle for New Beginnings* by John Philip Newell

JP brings together in a powerful way in this new book the topics that he has been working with over many years. He presents eight themes that it is vital for us to work with in order to be co-creators in the generation of new ways of experiencing and expressing the sacred. These need to meet the needs of contemporary people not only in our part of the world, but meet head-on the challenge of our global culture.

For many of these themes there are no prescriptions, but an invitation to let go of modes of thought that no longer serve the needs of humanity in our times, and to seek more unifying paradigms.

However "We are not being asked to flee. In staying reverently and sorrowfully, we are not being asked to deny that the death is occurring or to defend the irrelevance and sometimes falseness that have led to the collapse." **JP calls on us to engage in a process of faithful letting go, which will be fruitful.** One example he gives is of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in County Cork Ireland, who act on their holy instinct for oneness with the poor, and oneness with the earth in its yearning for healing. They invite young Irish people to farm their land organically. They have installed a Stations of the Cosmos Walk, linking their life of contemplation and action with the great journey of the universe.

I found the chapter on **Reconnecting with the Unconscious** in order to rebirth our depths particularly useful, acknowledging as it does the "need to go into the liminal realm between the known and unknown, to learn more of the way forward in our lives as individuals and communities. There we will find the coming together of the masculine and feminine..... In the unconscious the opposites lie side by side. It's only in the conscious world that there is separation."

Many visions of a New Age of harmony and global connectedness have been proclaimed and seemingly been sharply contradicted by developments such as those in the Middle East. It is refreshing to see the acknowledgement in this book that we don't know the best ways forward

and need to do a great deal of listening to the depth dimension within us in order to get a sense of how to make our contributions to today's world.

JP calls for renewal in these terms: "If the river of our Christian story is not flowing, it will cease because we will cease to be in tune with the nature of the universe, which is forever seeking new form and unfolding into what has never been known before. Just as we descend into the unconscious every night to be renewed, so our Christian story needs to re-enter the world of dreaming and imagining to be born anew."

JP sees the challenge today as whether to speak from self contained places such as religious traditions, or from the open place of relationship with the earth and all its creatures. This certainly strikes a chord, but for me poses a dilemma as far as the future of the institutional church is concerned.

We are in a period where our politicians seem not to know how to bring more fairness to our society, and where the leaders of both the Anglican and Catholic churches have been making powerful statements about the need to rebalance our societies and economies in order to respond to the needs of those without a voice and without resources. The voice of our religious leaders still commands the attention of world media in a way that individuals and small groups can't replicate. Churches in Britain today

are making strong practical responses to the crises of food not being affordable and of large scale debt ruining people's lives.

So while agreeing that a different ethos needs to take root in the conduct of our churches, I would be reluctant to see these institutions disbanded, however much their theologies need to be renewed.

Your views on this topic would be welcome for future newsletters or as a blog post on our website. Please send me any comments at petra.griffiths@livingspirit.org.uk.

The LS [Journeying Together Group](#) took *The Rebirthing of God* as its discussion topic for December, and a number of people were keen to read the whole book.

It provided very rich fare for our 75 minute session, to the point where people felt they couldn't absorb all the themes in one go. This book would probably be best studied and responded to over a series of sessions if local groups are going to take it as a discussion topic.

To find out more about JP Newell and his work, go to: www.heartbeatjourney.org/j-p-newell.

Petra Griffiths

7. Review of *In Tune with Heaven or Not: Women in Christian Liturgical Music* by June Boyce-Tillman

This wide-ranging book aims to deconstruct the musical liturgical tradition in a way that is both holistic and analytical. As Professor of Applied Music at Winchester University, Anglican priest, and drum-playing singer, June is well qualified to undertake both sides of this study. The title of her book is a reference to *In Tune with Heaven: Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church Music* (1992).

The root issue which June takes from the work of Michael Kirwan (*Discovering Girard*, 2004) is the lack of a transcendent myth, an emotionally satisfying narrative and shared purpose that speaks to our humanity. **In this book June aims to look at how liturgical music needs to be reworked in order that we arrive at such a myth.**

Part of the secret is to examine the many subjugated ways of knowing of the different groups whose varied ways of knowing have been suppressed, as well as the wisdom of the earth itself. Women's musical creativity is one of those subjugated approaches.

Challenging musical patriarchy involves more than making women's musical achievements visible. June believes it also involves a fundamental rethinking of the nature of musical meaning and identity.

There is a very interesting section based on Margaret Lindley's 1995 article *Competing Trinities: The Great Mother and the Formation of the Christian Trinity*. In this study the construction of the male Trinity went hand in hand with the exclusion of women from the musical ministry of the Church. As June puts it "The history of Christianity has been, until the end of the twentieth century, that of the systematic exclusion of women from both the central mysteries of bread and wine and from the central mystery of music." With the gradual adoption of more inclusive language, our present time is the first in which there is a combination of a belief in the God who is partly of wholly feminine and having women in positions of authority in the church – so a vital moment to apply ourselves to broadening the range of liturgical music.

Hildegard of Bingen is given as an example of a composer who successfully resolved the divisions of everyday life in a "transcendent relationality" through which people often experience a luminous cosmic connection in listening to her music. Oppositions such as dark/light, body/soul and good/evil are integrated, with the dark sides of life always being brought into relationship with the life-giving aspects.

The chapter on our present period *Inning and Outing: Contemporary Practices* contains much good information about myriad informal liturgical groups who have been working with the re-

integration of the feminine and the earth. It lists much valuable music suitable for use by such groups.

However the book isn't sanguine about the ease of bringing the Wisdom tradition into formal liturgical music contexts. The chapter *Hymns or Hers: Hymnody Past and Present* identifies issues and ways people have found in getting their voices heard.

The cost of this book (£49) will be a barrier to it getting the attention it deserves. I can only hope that groups can get together to purchase it and use the inspiration it provides for the creation of meaningful liturgies for our times.

Petra Griffiths

8. New Living Spirituality Music and Spirituality Special Interest Group

Coordinator: Rev Professor June Boyce-Tillman.

This group was launched along with June's book, *In Tune with Heaven or Not*, at a joint *Living Spirituality*/St James's Piccadilly event on 23 November 2014.

The Music and Spirituality group will have a wide ranging desire to explore how music plays a part in both in personal and cultural spiritual journey. It will include the use of music and sound within Christianity, and in various faith traditions, exploring sacred writings and theological insights on the topic; but it will also challenge the musical leadership

within the established traditions and look at the role of intuition, the feminine, the spiritual experience and community building as associated with music/sound. So it will seek to include both cultural and personal stories of music making, listening and discovery.

The group will operate initially online, and a Google group has been set up to facilitate discussion. There is the possibility of occasional conferences involving the University of Winchester and Winchester Cathedral.

To register interest in the group go to: www.livingspirit.org.uk/music-and-spirituality-group.

9. Engendering a generation of men who will be leaders and wise elders

In our newsletter we have often reported on efforts to bring women's voices into theology, liturgy and spirituality. **You may also want to know about the initiative by Male Journey UK (www.malejourney.org.uk), which seeks a life-changing spirituality and to provide men with opportunities to do their own inner work in the company of other men.**

Their website states: "We affirm and support men seeking a life-long journey of spiritual consciousness in order to transform themselves, and through these journeys, their relationships, families, workplaces, communities and our environment."

Male Journey UK is fed by “wisdom traditions of forgiveness and radical inclusivity”, and regards its roots as within the Judeo-Christian traditions. It also draws on the perennial wisdom of many eastern and western traditions.

The Franciscan writer Richard Rohr is a big source of inspiration for this movement, including the Men’s Rites of Passage events that provide contemporary opportunities to make meaningful transitions to different stages of life and consciousness

Male Journey UK wants to enable men to let go of those patterns and beliefs that no longer serve them and to reconnect with the power of nature, mystery and the universe.

“We seek to engender a generation of men who will be leaders and elders in their diverse roles as sons, partners, fathers, grandfathers, colleagues, stewards and servers “

There is little information on the website about who is involved with taking this initiative forward. However, Llansor Mill in South East Wales (www.llansor.org) and Holy Rood House in North Yorkshire (www.holyroodhouse.org.uk), are two centres linked with **LivingSpirituality**, who regularly offer workshops for both women and men separately.

10. The Grace of Encounter

by Julie Dunstan

“Encountering the Tradition.

Encountering the Self. Encountering the Other.” This is the Encounter course strap-line at the London Spirituality Centre. And each year I’m astounded by the depth and grace of the encounters as tutors and students meet week by week to train in the ministry of spiritual direction, the art of accompanying another on their journey in God.

This year has been no exception. Sixteen students took part - from diverse traditions and backgrounds, all open to one another and to God in a way that seems unusual. And more than ‘seems’ because it is indeed what students remark upon again and again throughout the training; **how rare and moving it is to be able to bring their honesty and their love of God into the same room.**

Of course there are good examples of friendships and house groups and churches that invite an honest encounter with one another, with oneself and with whatever spiritual tradition one might belong to. But it is, alas, more common to feel that there might be one place to talk about God and quite another place to be real about who we are; the hopes and longings, the fears and conflicts, the doubt and darkness, and even the secret and wonderful glimpses of God’s presence and love in the ordinary.

In some sectors of the church, to reveal certain feelings is considered a lack of faith; in others, dangerous; and in still others, just bad manners! Equally we might find ourselves at dinner with a friend or at a social gathering being quite able to be frank about almost anything: except God.

Spiritual Direction is a spacious ministry inside which all is allowed and encouraged. **At the heart of this ministry is the belief that God can be discovered most deeply in those moments when we encounter our truest self;** when we are open to the challenge and gift of the other; and when we allow the wisdom of the tradition and its sacred writing to illuminate our experience. The spiritual direction relationship allows all three dimensions to be explored – allowing a God-space larger than any one dimension can bring.

This is the experience that inspires our listening as spiritual directors; and allows us to encourage those we sit with to listen more deeply to those same things, trusting that God will be revealed there.

Encounter is a new training programme in spiritual direction, which arises out of the 25 years of holy listening and learning in what was the London Course in Spiritual Direction. It sits within the London Spirituality Centre in its home in St Edmund the King on Lombard Street. It is firmly rooted in the Christian tradition and draws insight from modern

psychological understanding in conversation with the unique perspective and needs of contemporary culture. It is a challenging brief and it is still being developed. But my prayer is that it will be a place of integrity and hospitality, intelligence and heart, for all those seeking to foster the life of Christ in the world.

Comments from past course participants include acknowledgement of the “deep sharing and listening” that the course facilitates. Sue Woolley, a Unitarian minister found it very “open, welcoming and inclusive.” Roger Ferguson likened it to a map of the London Underground, which “invites me to ponder on possibilities for travel for today’s Pilgrim.to connect the places visited to find meaning, and ultimately at the end of the line an ‘All change’.” Susanne Griffin commented “In the everyday world, it is very hard to find companions for this kind of conversation and exploration – even in Church!”

For more details, contact the Administrator, Gaynor Harper, on encounter@spiritualitycentre.org.uk www.spiritualitycentre.org **Open evening:** 22 January, 6 - 7.30 pm. www.spiritualitycentre.org/index.php/whats-on

Julie Dunstan is Director of **Encounter** at the London Spirituality Centre.

11. Despair, Hope and the forthcoming General Election

Having just seen the play **Hope** by Jack Thorne at the Royal Court, in which Labour councillors in an unspecified Northern town grapple with how to make the huge cuts to services needed in order to balance their budget, we came away wondering why it was called 'Hope' rather than 'Despair'.

One of the questions raised by an "Old Labour" former Leader is why people haven't been out in the streets protesting at the costs being born by the parts of the population least able to manage the loss of local resources.

It seems as though there is a pervasive feeling of powerlessness, perhaps resulting from the lack of impact of the large demonstration against the Iraq War. Most of us get on with our lives and aren't sure what we can usefully do. Peter Challen, an LS subscriber has taken a very decisive course of action along with a former Charter 88 colleague, and formed a new political party - **2015 Constitutionalists UK** – at Runnymede in November 2014.

"Our political and economic systems are not fit for purpose. There is no longer any trust by the people in our institutions. We aim therefore at a root & branch reform of all of our political & economic systems."

To find out more about this highly ambitious initiative, go to www.2015constitutionalists.uk.

As they say at the BBC, other parties are also available!

With good wishes for 2015,
Petra

Petra Griffiths

LivingSpirituality Coordinator

For details of the **LS Steering Group** go to www.livingspirit.org.uk/who-we-are/steering-group.